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## 2.9 Political security in the Barents Region

*Dorothee Cambou*

Political security is a crucial component of human security. The concept underlies and crosscuts all other aspects of human security. However, it is also poorly defined and the topic is not well addressed from a Barents perspective. In this regard, the purpose of the following analysis is to define and assess contemporary political security challenges in the Barents Region. In this assessment, the study more specifically argues that political security is intertwined with democracy and human rights but that some issues and concerns subsist in the Barents Region notably in relation to the respect and protection of the rights of citizens, the rights of indigenous peoples and the preservation of the peace and security in the region following the impacts of the Ukrainian crisis.

### 1 Definition

Originally the concept of political security was ‘not widely used or accepted in social studies’ (United Nations Development Programme 1990, 3). It is also a concept that is imprecise and ambivalent. Nevertheless, it has also been more recently considered that political society remains a ‘relevant concept for gathering concerns in the political action’ (Costa 2008, 568). In this regard, it is important to clarify the concept in order to ensure a more informed debate about its use and implementation.

Traditionally, political security has been loosely defined in reference to the protection of basic human rights. In this regard, political security must be distinguished from national security, which essentially focuses on the protection of the nation and the values espoused by the national society. Political security is concerned with the rights of individuals and peoples, not those of the states or nations. In its 1994 report, the UNDP indicates more precisely that political security is one of the most ‘important aspects of human security’ and includes the protection of people against ‘political repression, systematic torture, ill treatment or disappearance’ as well as ‘political detention and imprisonment’ (United Nations Development Programme 1990, 32). In accordance with this interpretation, political security therefore encompasses the defence of individuals against any form of political repression or human rights abuses. A predominant focus on repression is, however, insufficient in comprehensively addressing the

issue of political security. While political security necessarily entails the negative obligation of the state to refrain from interfering with basic individual freedoms, it also includes positive obligations for national authorities to take necessary measures to safeguard basic political rights (*Hokkanen v. Finland*, 24 August 1994).<sup>1</sup> The protection of such rights include the freedom to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of press, the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and the freedom of movement. These rights are protected under international law, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been ratified by 184 states around the world. In this sense, political security also ensures people's ability to take part in the political life of the society to which they belong therefore sustaining a democratic governance system.

In this sense, political security is closely intertwined with democratic governance: 'democracy provides the political foundation necessary to sustaining all other dimensions of security' (Young 2002). Similarly, political security involves 'support to transition to democratic practices', a view also shared by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UN Human Security Unit 2009, 21). There is also a growing consensus under international law that only in a democratic system can individuals fully exercise their human rights. Conversely, 'only when human rights are respected can democracy flourish' (European Commission 2013). Thus, human rights and democracy are inextricably related and mutually reinforcing. Democratic governance provides the framework, institutions and process to uphold a state's responsibility to safeguard the rights and needs of the population. On the other hand, human rights provide a set of values that inform the content of democratic governance and sustain political security. In practice, achieving the ambitions of political security has therefore become tied to the promotion of democracy and human rights.

The links between democratic governance and human rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further developed in the ICCPR, which recognises a host of political rights and civil liberties underpinning meaningful democracies. More specifically, article 25 of the Covenant recognises and protects the right of every citizen 'to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the right to vote and to be elected and the right to have access to public service'. According to the Human Rights Committee, which is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the ICCPR by its State parties, 'Article 25 lies at the core of democratic government based on the consent of the people' (General Comment No 25, 1996, para.2). However, democracy does not only centre on the electoral process. The definition of democracy must be holistic and encompass procedural and the substantive elements. In other words, democratic governance must ensure that the outcomes of elections are representative of the people. It must also ensure that the will of peoples is freely exercised, and that all individuals can participate in political affairs free from discrimination. Democracy also implies the establishment of governance structures, which ensure freedom of

expression and access to information, as well as guarantees the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Democracy is thus an intersectional issue. It enjoins all political rights and freedoms necessary to ensure 'the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives' (UN General Assembly 2009).

Whereas democracy originally focused on the individual rights of citizens to freely participate in electoral processes without discrimination, democracy also 'entails a principle that everyone whose basic interests are affected by policies should be included in the process of making them' (Young 2002). In this regard, the concept of democracy has now become more inclusive and implies the participation of minorities and indigenous peoples groups in the decision-making processes that affect them. More particularly, ensuring the engagement of indigenous peoples and their organisations has now become critical for preventing, resolving conflicts and enhancing democratic governance (UNDP 2001). In this regard, the study of democracy as a governance framework involves the collective inclusion of indigenous peoples and minority groups in decision-making processes concerning them and their right to participate in the governance of their traditional land and natural resources. This conceptualisation of democracy is far-reaching, and is further entrenched within the intersections between political security and personal and community security (*see* chapters 2.7 and 2.8).

Alongside the extension of its subject, the extension of the concept of democracy outside the framework of the state polity is also increasingly taken into account. As postulated by Grigorescu, during these last decades, democratic norms have spread from domestic politics to intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) (Grigorescu 2015). Democratic values influence the institutional design and work of intergovernmental organisations such as the UN. In effect, democracy is now one of the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations. Thus the contemporary definition of democracy must be inclusive and comprehensive. It concerns the decision-making processes that involve formal institutions and informal processes; people of all genders, majorities and minorities; governments and civil society; and includes institutions at the national, local and international levels.

While it is 'obvious that democracy, or the installation of democratic regimes, is a component of political security' (Costa 2008, 562), democracy remains flexible and is set on open-texture political values. As noted by the UN, 'democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people'. Moreover, it is also recognised as well that, while these norms and standards are both universal and essential to democracy, there is no one model of democracy (General Assembly resolution 62/7). Indeed, the ideal of democracy is rooted in philosophies and traditions from many regions of the world. While the western standards of democracy have a value for the new democracies, the democratic ideal should integrate and suits local conditions and particularities (Beetham et al. 2008). In this regard, securing democratic

governance as a means to ensure political security can be pursued through diverse routes. This diversity has cast some doubts on whether any form of democracy can always provide political security for all. It is also questionable to which extent the standards of universal democracy can/are truly being dissociated from western values in practice.

Nonetheless, because democracies are less conflict-prone than non-democracies (e.g. Russett and Oneal 2001) and democratising countries with well-managed transitions are less likely to be engaged in interstate warfare (Landman 2005), ensuring democratic governance continues to be a main element in enhancing political security. Ultimately, the promotion of democracy as a means to ensure political security must therefore be valued and contextualised in accord with the population that invokes it.

## **2 Contextualisation**

Preserving and maintaining political security requires democratic governance. However, 'democratization is a process that requires time and patience', and which must 'be built from within societies' and 'cannot be imported, or exported, but supported' (Beetham et al. 2008, 7). As noted in the 1993 Barents declaration, the Barents institutions were established to meet this need: to support 'the ongoing process of reform in Russia which aims, *inter alia*, at strengthening democracy, market reforms, and local institutions, and which is therefore important for closer regional co-operation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region'. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the situation in Russia and its relation with Nordic countries changed. During this period, the discourse on political security also shifted from traditional security, which concerns the protection of the state, military issues and war, to a focus on human security and the needs of the Barents population. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation began its transition to democracy. In line with democratising principles, the Russian Federation pursued renewed cooperation with its European neighbours, notably increasing its cooperation with Nordic states through the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. In 1996, the Russian Federation acceded to the Council of Europe, the oldest European institution and main protector of rule of law, human rights and democracy on the old continent 'on the basis of its democratic progress, taking into account the particular circumstances following the fall of the Soviet Union.' (Bindig 2010, 35; Massias 2007, 6; Stahl 2011, 176).

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, support for democratic development has become a vital aspect of Barents cooperation. According to the Norwegian Barents secretariat, the Barents cooperation is considered 'as an integral part of creating a stable, democratic and prosperous Europe', which brings 'administrative structures closer to the citizens and to improve the democratic functions of society' (The Norwegian Barents Secretariat 2017). This recognition of the common democratic values of the region are also present in the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration and in reference to several other documents

published under the auspices of the Barents cooperation.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, the Kirkenes Declaration reiterated that the Barents cooperation is ‘a unique undertaking that confirms the value of close interaction between intergovernmental cooperation, cooperation among county administrations and direct people-to-people cooperation’ that seeks to develop its ‘societies in full respect of internationally recognised principles for ensuring sustainable development’. Thus, the achievements of the last two decades have been the development of closer cooperation between local and regional initiatives by Barents communities and institutions, as well as the increase in activities across sectors such as business and civil society (Kirkenes Declaration 2013). In this regard, the regional framework has successfully strengthened cooperation between governance mechanisms.

Despite this progress, the democratic transition of the whole Barents Region remains incomplete. In its 2015 concluding observation report, the Human Rights Committee expressed its continuous concern regarding the Russian Government’s failure to ensure freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as to combat the rise of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and to eradicate torture and ill treatment (Human Rights Committee 2015). Today, the Russian Federation also continues to have the largest number of pending cases before the European Court of Human Rights. Moreover,

the examination of recent developments in the field democratic transition at local and regional level has shown that Russia, despite first positive signs at the beginning of the reforms in 2000, has still not been able to meet the obligations it committed to when acceding to the CoE.

(Stahl 2011)

Although this issue mainly concerns Russia, it also has implications for the Barents Region. In 2017, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, a non-governmental organisation that works to promote respect for human rights, requested ‘Norwegian authorities to increase the emphasis on democracy and human rights in the Russian part of the Barents Region,’ because ‘on the Russian side, the human rights problems remain very severe’ (Human Rights House 2007). In addition, studies like the *Freedom in the World* survey for 2017 notes a continued decline in Russia in the field of political rights and civil liberties, notably ‘due to the heavily flawed 2016 legislative elections, which further excluded opposition forces from the political process’ (Freedom House 2017a). Similarly, the *Nations in Transit* survey for 2017 indicates a low Russian performance when it comes to national democratic governance, electoral processes, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, independence and corruption (Freedom House 2017b). Altogether, a low performance on these elements represent an important threat to the democracy and the political security of Russian citizens.

In contrast to the Russian Federation, the Nordic countries are among the champions of human rights and democracy. For many years, Norway, Sweden and Finland have shared the top positions on several democracy analyses (Global Democracy Ranking 2015; The Economist 2016; Freedom House 2017a). Yet, the Nordic countries are not entirely exempt from political insecurity concerns. The consolidation of democracy and the safeguard of human rights are continuous processes. As indicated by minister of foreign affairs Børge Brende, human rights and rule of law are central components of good democratic governance:

human rights provide a framework for identifying and addressing inequalities and thus ensuring that no one is left behind. This includes safeguarding the rights of those who are hardest to reach – the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, including indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities.

(Brende 2014)

The recognition and protection of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the Nordic countries remains nonetheless a major issue. The protection of the rights of the Sámi people, and their inclusion in the democracy of their respective states, implies the recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination. This has yet to occur in practice (Anaya 2011; Tauli-Corpuz 2016). Whereas the economic and social situation of the Sámi people is better than it is for many other indigenous peoples around the world, the Sámi in the Nordic countries continue to face major human rights challenges that affect their political security as a distinct people living in western democratic states (Multiculturalism Policy Index 2010).

Finally, political security is interconnected with peace and stability. However, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Eastern Ukraine have raised questions about the Russian Federation's governmental relationship with European countries. This event also incurred great speculations about conflict in the Barents Region that could threaten the political security of its population.

With this context in mind, the purpose of the next section is to assess some of the issues that currently challenge the democratic order of the Barents Region and the political security of its population.

### **3 Assessment**

There are many political security challenges that can be identified in the Barents Region. While such challenges are complex and interconnected, it is possible to narrow the scope of insecurity issues to three main components. The first component concerns the protection of democratic rights, which includes safeguards on the rights of individual citizens to vote, and their other political freedoms. The second component concerns the collective rights of

indigenous peoples, their inclusion in decision-making process and the exercise of their right to self-determination. The last component concerns the stability of the region and the geopolitical relations between the Russian Federation and its neighbouring countries, as well as the preservation of cooperation across the borders of the Barents Region.

The following section subsequently analyses each component as a challenge to political security in the Barents Region.

### ***3.1 Political rights and freedoms***

In the Barents Region, the consolidation and strengthening of democracy is an on-going process. This process entails the protection of the right to vote and the guarantee of political freedoms at all levels of the decision-making process.

The right to vote in national, regional and local elections is crucial to ensure the establishment of representative institutions in a democracy, because the authority of the government derives itself from the consent of the governed. According to statistics from Patchwork Barents,<sup>3</sup> the voter turnout in the latest elections to national, regional and local legislative assemblies, as well as in regional parliament elections, varies substantially within the Barents Region. National elections are much more popular among Barents citizens, with a turn out ranging from 50% in Arngalesk Oblast to 87.5% in Vasterbotten (Ulyanova 2015). Also, whereas Sweden had a voter turnout of over 80% in regional elections, all other regions in Norway, Finland and Russia registered considerably lower participation. In Arkhangelsk Oblast, only 20.99% of the electorate participated in the gubernatorial elections and in Murmansk Oblast, the average turnout throughout the regional elections was 23.10%. In contrast, elections held in the Republic of Karelia in 2011 gathered a turnout of 44.4%, and in the Komi Republic in 2015, this figure was 44.2%. At the regional level, Finnish and Norwegian voters were also more active voters. The latest (2012) turnout figures for Lapland and Northern Ostrobothnia were 60.6 and 56.5%. In Norway, according to NRK,<sup>4</sup> the local election turnout in Nordland, Troms and Finnmark was 59.8, 58.9 and 58.1% respectively in 2015. In comparison with previous elections, the turnout in Norway was, however, significantly lower than in the previous elections organised in 2011, which gathered a turnout of 63.4, 64.6 and 61.7% voters across the three counties respectively. Thus, the participation of citizens in the electoral process has been decreasing, though this is probably also reflective of a global crisis of trust in the democratic process.

However, while all modern democracies hold elections, not all elections are democratic. In order to ensure democratic elections, all citizens should be entitled to exercise their right to vote free from discrimination. Genuine and periodic elections are also essential to ensure the accountability of representatives for the exercise of the legislative or executive powers vested in them. In accordance with Article 25 ICCPR, 'such elections must be held at intervals which are not unduly long and which ensure that the authority of



government continues to be based on the free expression of the will of electors.' According to the HRC, reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may also 'be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party' (HRC 1996, para. 19).

In the Russian Barents, however, irregularities have been noted which question the democratic nature of national and local elections. According to the independent election watchdog, Golos,<sup>5</sup> 'the main problems in Russian elections are connected with the activities of state officials on both national and local level. The officials actively use their available administrative resources to promote party interests in public events and the media' (Staalesen 2016). These irregularities were especially reported in Arkhangelsk, which was one of the regions with the biggest number of registered offences.

Another issue of concern in the Barents Region concerns youth. Whereas the interests of young people and their involvement in different regional activities is essential to strengthening civil society and democracy in the Barents Region,<sup>6</sup> the lack of engagement of youth in political affairs is sufficiently significant to be reported. In Norway, it has been noted that the number of first-time voters (18–21 years) practising their right to vote in local elections dropped from 53% in 1971 to below 30% in 2007 (Dalhaug 2012, 77). Voter turnout among youth is also lower than among adults in both local and national parliament elections, and the number of young members in Norwegian political parties has also fallen from about 44,000 in 1977 to 23,000 in 1995.<sup>7</sup> Russia is experiencing similar disproportionality, with figures in 2007 from the Komi Republic showing that 37.3% of the population aged 18–30 years took part in the regional elections, 49.6% in elections to the State Duma and 58% in presidential elections. While the lack of political engagement in young people through participation in elections should not be overstated, according to Dalhaug, project manager for the Barents Youth project at the Norwegian Barents in 2003, 'the low number of young people involved in political activity in more conventional forms calls for concern' (Dalhaug 2012, 77). More particularly, the low number of political youth organisations and the low number of youth representatives in local and regional constituencies can undermine the representative outcome of political decision-making processes and their relevance for youth. As noted by the Barents Youth Council, 'youth need experience in democratic decision-making processes to understand the benefits of democratic societies' (BEAC Youth Working Group 2011). In this regard, youth involvement in the Barents Region must be strengthened through their inclusion in decision-making processes and through increased support for youth engagement in NGOs and media, in order to foster active citizenship and a plural democratic process.

Finally, participation in electoral processes is no panacea for democracy. Beyond participation in the political processes, it is also important to ensure that all citizens benefit from their political freedoms. However, the democracy scores and regime ratings of the country of Russia continue to raise general

concern, which also affects the political security of the Barents population. According to the Freedom of House's 2017 report, Russia's democratic score is declining. More particularly, the organisation argues that 'the regime sought to perfect its authoritarian control over Russian citizens and the economy in order to prevent any real democratic changes' (Freedom House 2017b). To some extent, those conclusions are consistent with the 2014 HRC conclusions on Russia's State report, which stresses the need for the government to take all necessary measures to ensure that individuals fully enjoy their freedom of speech and the expression of dissenting political opinion, their right to peaceful assembly and their freedom of association (HRC 2015, para 18–22). In particular, government measures to suppress political dissent and the 'reports of harassment, violence and killing of lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders and opposition politicians' have raised strong concern in Russia (HRC 2015, para 18–19). In relation to peaceful assembly, the HRC also expressed concern

about consistent reports of arbitrary restrictions on the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly, including violent and unjustified dispersal of protesters by law enforcement officers, arbitrary detentions and imposition of harsh fines and prison sentences for the expression of political views.

(HRC 2015, para. 21)

Concerning the freedom of association, the Committee also worried about 'restrictions on the operations of NGO activities and to suspension or voluntary closure of some NGOs' (HRC 2015, para. 22). The right to free association and peaceful assembly are, however, essential in conjunction to the rights of individuals to participate in political affairs, and are protected under article 25 of the ICCPR. In this regard, it is required of states to ensure that basic freedoms are protected in their internal management, in order to enable citizens to fully exercise their democratic rights. In the absence of fully-fledged protection of such rights, the political security of citizens living in the Russian Federation remains consequently pale in comparison to the situation afforded to the population in the Nordic countries.

### ***3.2 Inclusion and self-determination***

While it is fundamental to ensure that individual citizens can fully exercise their democratic rights, it is also crucial to ensure that all peoples participate in political life and are active decision-makers – especially indigenous peoples. This is essential to overcome historical inequalities and discrimination. However, in the Barents, the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the democratic system remains an ongoing issue in all four states.

In the Nordic states, the recognition and protection of the rights of the Sámi people has made some progress in the last thirty years. This includes the establishment of a Sámi assembly in each of the three Nordic countries to

represent the Sámi community at the domestic level, which also exercises certain competencies in the decision-making process affecting the Sami livelihoods. It also includes the adoption of multiple national regulations and legislations to ensure the protection of the cultural rights of the Sámi people, their language and traditional way of life. Yet, such progress has not been sufficient to remediate the historical inequality the Sámi people have faced, and have not evolved to protect them from new challenges, such as those provoked by the negative impacts of industrial development on their traditional lands. While it is important to reform legislative and political frameworks to guarantee the human rights of the Sámi people, the autonomy and self-governance powers of the Sámi parliaments must also be strengthened in order to ensure the right of the Sámi people to self-determination.

The right of the Sámi people to self-determination is an essential feature of their human rights and is the basis for their inclusion in the democratic orders that govern them. As noted by both the former and current Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there is an ongoing need to strengthen the Sámi Parliament's ability to participate in and genuinely influence decision-making in matters that affect the Sámi people (Anaya 2011, para. 37). In Finland and Sweden for instance, the Sámi Parliament does not have substantial influence or decision-making powers. Whereas in Finland the Sámi parliament has limited advising powers, in Sweden, the Sámi Parliament functions as both a popularly elected body and a State administrative agency which includes an obligation of the Sámi parliament to implement policies and decisions made by the Swedish Parliament and government institutions. This can be problematic, however, when decisions made by the Swedish Parliament do not reflect the view and interests of the Sámi people. In Norway, substantial progress has been made, especially since the Norwegian government has ratified Convention ILO 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and adopted a consultative agreement in 2005 to strengthen the political influence of the Sámi Parliament in political processes (Falch et al. 2016). Yet, in its 2016 report, the current Special Rapporteur, Tauli-Corpuz, noted that Norway should 'enhance efforts to implement the right of the Sámi people to self-determination and to more genuinely influence decision-making in areas of concern to them' (Tauli-Corpuz 2016, para. 76). In particular, she advised the need for a more effective consultation arrangement, which should also cover budgetary decisions. The following recommendations have, however, not yet been addressed by the Norwegian government.

In Russia, indigenous peoples have also called for 'greater democracy and participation' (Prakhova 2005). In effect, the situation for the Sámi people and other indigenous communities living in the country is even more alarming than it is in the Nordic states. This is in spite of the guarantees provided by the Russian Federation for the rights of small indigenous peoples under Article 69 of the Constitution. In its 2014 report, the HRC indicated for instance that it remains concerned regarding insufficient measures taken to respect and protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and to ensure that

members of such peoples are recognised as indigenous in Russia. In its report, the HRC stressed particular emphasis on the lack of protections for the traditional lands and sacred areas of indigenous peoples, which are ‘unprotected from desecration, contamination and destruction by extractive, development and related activities’. In addition, it also emphasised ‘that consultation with indigenous peoples on matters of interest to their communities is insufficiently enforced in practice and that access to effective remedies remains a challenge’ (HRC 2015, para. 23). This is the case for Nenets in Russia, where the development of extractive industry operations continues to undermine the traditional way of life of Nenets people, and activities continue without obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of the concerned communities for most proposed projects. Thus, there is a need for new governmental measures in order to effectively ensure the accommodation of the rights of indigenous peoples at the domestic level, and especially to ensure their right to self-determination, including their right to fully and meaningfully participate in the management of their land and territories.

Additionally, this extends to the right of indigenous peoples to represent their own interests through their own and truly representative organisations. The closure and reform of RAIPON, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East, because of an ‘alleged lack of correspondence between the association’s statutes and federal law’ have sparked major reactions both regionally and internationally. Today, it is still questioned whether the organisation operates under free and genuine indigenous control (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2012). In the absence of representative institutions, the situation of indigenous peoples’ rights is at risk of further erosion in Russia.

Finally, while the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples occurs primarily at the domestic level, it is also important for indigenous representatives to be included in the decision-making processes that operate on regional and international levels. In the Barents Region, indigenous peoples have strengthened their influence in decision-making processes affecting them through their participation in the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples. The working group consists of the representatives of the Sámi, Nenets and Veps peoples. It was established as a means to recognise the specific needs and interests of indigenous peoples living in the Barents Region. The working group has a specific position within the Barents cooperation framework; in addition to its operational role as a working group, it also has an advisory role to both the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional Council (BRC) (Working Group of Indigenous Peoples – BEAC 2017). Through this advisory function, the working group consequently has a political dimension. It can influence the decisions made by the BRC and the BEAC to the extent that the councils take its opinions into account. In addition, the working group can also participate in all Barents working group sessions. However, the working group solely offers consultative status for indigenous peoples within the Barents Councils institutions. Therefore, in order to enhance their rights

to self-determination, the Sámi together with the Nenets and the Veps have asked for permanent status within the Barents cooperation framework, as opposed to simply being granted consultative status as a working group. The status of permanent participant would afford them direct representation instead of indirect representation through a working group (BEAC Newsletter 2010). This way, indigenous peoples would be granted full and active participation within the BEAC and BRC as permanent participants, and, as they argue, this status would be in line with their right to self-determination.

The above analysis makes explicit that the inclusion of indigenous peoples in democratic governance remains an on-going issue in the Barents Region, both at the domestic and regional level. In order to ensure political security for all peoples in the Barents Region, it is consequently important that governance institutions at the local, national and regional levels recognise their land and cultural rights, promote inclusion and foster their full self-determination and participation in democracy as valued members of national societies and the regional Barents community.

### ***3.3 Peace and stability***

Political security is conditional to peace and stability. One of the best indicators for political insecurity in a country is the priority the government accords to military strength (UNDP 1994, 32). During the Cold War, the Barents Region was an area of military confrontation and therefore possessed a high level of human insecurity. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the possibilities for military conflict to take place in the region declined. The development of cooperation in the region also largely contributed to enhancing the peace and stability of the region. However, although it is unlikely that a conflict could start in the region, there are concerns that the region could be affected by geopolitical tensions elsewhere. In particular, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, have resulted in a strained relationship between the Nordic countries and the Russian government, which could threaten the peaceful state of affairs in the Arctic (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017). Although it is difficult to assess the full impact of such tensions for the Barents Region, the following subsection attempts to address some aspects relating to the peace and stability of the region.

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, the Ukrainian conflict increased political tensions between all Arctic countries. After the annexation of Crimea, the United States and the European Union enacted sanctions on Russian individuals and businesses, which were also reciprocated by Russian counter measures. Several types of sanctions have been imposed on Russia. The sanctions include asset freezes and travel bans on individuals and entities that have been involved or have benefited from Russia's actions in Ukraine, sectoral sanctions targeting the oil and gas, defence and financial sectors in Russia, and an arms embargo restrictions on doing business and investing in Russian-occupied Crimea. In addition, the sanctions also prohibit American and EU

companies from providing equipment and expertise to complex deep-water, Arctic and shale oil development projects in Russia. While the impact of the sanctions on Russian resources business remains limited – gas production and exports have fallen slightly and oil production remains unaffected for the time being<sup>8</sup> – the impact of financial sanctions has been immediate and significant. In particular, sanctions contributed to the collapse of the Russian ruble and the Russian financial crisis. With the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, such sanctions have isolated Russia from the global economy and held back its economic modernisation (EU Parliament 2016). Furthermore, it has also been reported that sanctions caused economic damage to a number of EU countries, with total losses estimated at €100 billion. In the Barents Region, Norway was particularly affected by the sanctions on Russia, with a drop by 28% year-on-year to a total of €672 million in the first half of 2015 and a major export decline, though Russian trade to Norway in the period increased by 10% to a total of €586 million (Staalesen 2015).

Despite economic tensions and little political contact since 2014, cooperation between Norway and Russia in the north has continued at the regional level. Most notably, the Barents cooperation has continued to operate in areas such as fisheries, border control, environment and nuclear safety. Broader people-to-people contact networks between Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and the northern parts of the Nordic countries have also been maintained. In fact, maintaining good relations in the Barents Region despite tensions in bilateral relations has been an objective for all governments. The importance of preserving cooperation in the Barents Region despite major geopolitical turmoil was also noted by the head of the Barents Regional Council, Arkhangelsk Governor Igor Orlov, who ‘told his Oblast government in September 2014 that complicated geopolitics should not affect Barents Cooperation’ (Nilsen 2017). In practice, the organisation of a series of high-level talks in the Barents-Euro Council after the annexation of Crimea underscores that mutual interests in the region have continued to guide cooperation in the region. As such, while media headlines speculated great potential for conflicts in the Barents-Arctic, a common understanding of joint interests in maintaining dialogue has contributed to preserving the peace and stability within the region.

In addition, military activities within the region do not currently constitute a threat for its stability. Even though the activities of NATO and Russia outside the Barents have raised some concerns, it must also be noted that NATO does not have a strong presence in the Arctic. After the end of the Cold War, NATO’s focus gradually shifted away from the Arctic to strengthen its role in the Mediterranean and more recently in the Eastern part of Europe. While a significant part of the region is within the territory of NATO members, NATO does not have a specific Arctic policy and therefore no clear role in the region. Nonetheless, following the Ukrainian crisis, the possibility and the importance of enhancing the presence of NATO in the region has been questioned. According to Øystein Bø (2016), State Secretary of the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, a strong NATO presence in the North would be in the

US' and Norway's interests. On the other hand, it has been stressed that the purpose of strengthening NATO's presence in the Barents does not inevitably aspire to revive or hearten conflict in the region. As noted by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in his 2016 speech, 'NATO does not seek confrontation with Russia'. NATO 'does not want a new Cold War' nor 'wants a new arms race'. Rather, its 'aim is a more positive and a more cooperative relationship with Russia' (Stoltenberg 2016). In this regard, it is also suggested that an increasing NATO presence does not necessarily mean an increased focus on hard security issues. Instead, it has been suggested that NATO would focus on 'soft security' issues including the ecological consequences of global warming and the risk of manmade and environmental disasters (Sergunin 2015, 110). Although this focus does not exclude military components of NATO policy, as reflected in a series of exercises conducted under the NATO allegiance, Sergunin argues that NATO reinforced involvement in the Arctic would principally target human activities and the global competition for resources (Sergunin 2015, 110). As such, the strengthening of NATO presence and military activities would not necessarily constitute a factor of insecurity for its population but perhaps could provide a means to increase political security in the region.

Yet, relations between Russia and the Nordic countries remain complicated and influenced by larger geopolitical developments, especially in the domain of military activities occurring outside the Barents Region. In 2013, Russia's Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, indicated during the Barents Summit in Kirkenes 'that Moscow sees the Arctic as an area with good opportunities to implement joint programs and initiatives' (Nilsen 2017). However, he also underlined that 'any expansion of NATO to include Sweden and Finland would upset the balance of power and force Russia to respond'. With Finland and Sweden strengthening their ties to NATO and growing speculation around joining the Alliance, Russia continues to warn that they would be forced to take a military response if such a situation materialised, without however, clarifying the extent to which such a response would entail (O'Dwyer 2016). Currently, it also remains questionable whether Sweden and Finland would compromise their non-alignment policy. In 2016, Margot Wallstrom, Foreign Minister, indicated that these policies have served them well until today and 'contributes to stability and security in northern Europe' (Wallstrom 2016). However, Sweden military exercise with US and NATO troops around the Baltic Sea island of Gotland in 2017 in response to large scale military exercises by Russia on the borders of Europe have again raised the possibility of the country joining NATO. According to the Swedish Defence Minister, the Swedish military exercise constitutes 'important signal to the Swedish population and also to other countries and partners that (they) take this security situation seriously' (Hultqvist 2017). Although those events demonstrate that the security situation in the vicinity of the Nordic states have deteriorated since the Crimea crisis (Fiskvik 2016), it nevertheless remains difficult to prognosticate to which extent those

developments will affect more generally the stability of the Barents Region and its population.

In any event, ensuring peace and stability requires the maintenance of dialogue between all national governments, in particular concerning military activities in order to ensure that regional military activities do not jeopardise cooperation in the Barents. In addition, it is also important to ensure transparency in military exercises along national borders and to ensure the provision of necessary information to all concerned parties. An increase in Russian unannounced military exercises since 2014 have raised concerns regarding the Russian government's lack of clear expression on its motivations (NATO's Timo Koster and US deputy permanent representative to NATO Earle Litzenberger in Gronning and Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs Conference 2016). In this regard, it is generally agreed that more 'stability, predictability and cooperation with Russia is needed in the Arctic' (Gronning and Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs Conference 2016). Whether these goals are achievable with a more involved NATO in the region is, however, still contested (Gronning and Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs Conference 2016). As a result, monitoring the development of peaceful military relations and activities in the Barents should continue in order to ensure that cross-border cooperation and the promotion of human security prevail in the future.

#### **4 Conclusions**

With the establishment of the Barents cooperation and the development of cross-borders relations between peoples and institutions since the 1990s, the Barents Region has become one of the most peaceful and stable regions in the world.

Yet, the political security of the Barents population is not unchallenged. As previously discussed, beyond peace and stability, political security necessarily involves guaranteeing the democratic governance of states and human rights of the population. In the Barents Region, there is an excellent level of protection afforded to the individual political rights of citizens living in the Nordic countries, but mediocre guarantees provided for those living in Russia. There are also concerns in both countries about the level of participation in electoral activities, which constitutes the primary medium to ensure the exercise of democracy. Finally, there is also a clear lack of political freedom in Russia and a lag in the rights to free press, association and assembly, which in turn constrain democracy and political security in this part of the region. In this regard, there is a clear and urgent need for the promotion, enhancement and assurance of basic human rights and political freedoms in the Barents Region for all citizens.

Additionally, the present analysis has also demonstrated that political security in the Barents Region concerns the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the political and democratic order of the Barents Region. For many decades,



indigenous peoples have been colonised, marginalised and forcibly assimilated by their states. Today, they continue to suffer from the grievous consequences of historical injustices and contemporary challenges, which include the lack of inclusion in decision-making processes affecting them and the exploitation of their traditional lands and resources. Fuelling more support to indigenous representative institutions through the recognition of their rights to self-determination is therefore fundamental to increasing political security in the Barents Region. In particular, the ratification of ILO Convention 169 and the adoption of the Nordic Sámi Convention would be key elements to enhance the political and legislative framework of all the Barents states concerning the rights of the Sámi people. While the Barents institutions have already recognised the specific status of indigenous peoples through the establishment of the working group on indigenous peoples, strengthening the role and influence of this mechanism would also be a means to increase the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes affecting them at the regional level. Ultimately, there is a pressing need to adopt a holistic perspective towards the rights of indigenous peoples in order to ensure that their political security is equally ensured in the Barents Region.

Finally, preserving peace and stability in the region is also required. Political security remains indeed conditional to peace and stability. Whereas it is unlikely that conflicts would resurface in the Barents Region (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017), reinforcing dialogue and cooperation between concerned actors and strengthening transparency and predictability in the field of military activities remains necessary both within and outside the Barents Region. While cooperation in the Barents Region has been maintained despite the Ukrainian crisis, recent events have raised some tensions and concerns regarding military relations and its significance for the region. In this context, maintaining peaceful military relations between states must continue in order to ensure that cross-border cooperation and the improvement of human security prevail in the region.

## Notes

- 1 European Court of Human Rights, *Hokkanen v. Finland*, 24 August 1994.
- 2 XII Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Joint communiqué, Murmansk, 15 October 2009; XV Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Oulu, 15 October 2015.
- 3 Patchwork Barents, <http://patchworkbarents.org/>, last visited on 17-07-2017
- 4 NRK, Norwegian Result, [www.nrk.no/norge/resultater-valg-2015-1.12499895](http://www.nrk.no/norge/resultater-valg-2015-1.12499895), last visited on 17-07-2017.
- 5 Golos was awarded the Sakharov Prize its 'outstanding efforts to promote democratic values through free and fair elections' by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 2012.
- 6 BEAC Committee of Senior Officials 2008.
- 7 Norwegian Government, NOU 2001: 03, [www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/krd/dok/nouer/2001/nou-2001-03.html?id=143453](http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/krd/dok/nouer/2001/nou-2001-03.html?id=143453), last visited on 17-07-2017.
- 8 However, it is stated that oil export earnings have dropped significantly but this is certainly due to lower oil prices. In 2016, Russian oil companies were planning to export 6% less than in 2015, (EU Parliament, 2016).

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